

## DHS January Meeting Recap

Andrew Fleet and his "Growing Chefs!" have just celebrated their tenth Anniversary, and still growing strong. With the financial support of many individuals and companies, the Growing Chefs! program benefits thousands of school age children in London and surrounding areas to learn more about food, how to prepare it for their well being and to appreciate the time and effort it takes to grow from the local farmers.

The premise behind his work is to get children excited about healthy wholesome food. He and his knowledgeable staff do this by recreating some of the programs on the food network, such as mystery boxes and the children rise to the challenge. The challenges range from knowing your fractions, science and world geography lessons while learning all about food, and its source.

At present there are about 5000 school children that have benefited from this year round program. The entire school participates in age appropriate lessons, and the 6 chosen schools came from Woodstock, Chatham, Port Burwell and Ingersoll this year. The JK and SK program focuses on tasting with all your senses. The Grade 1 & 2 classes learn all about seeds and explore what they grow into and the Chef team leads an interactive cooking demonstration where children help to make a healthy snack from seeds. The grade 3 & 4 children discover that their favorite math is the kind you can eat by using their fractions to measure ingredients. Grade 5 & 6 realize that the first bite of food you try, can get you excited about the rest of the meal by entertaining the mouth or (amuse-bouche). Grade 7 & 8 learn that stir-frying is a great way to cook healthy foods that taste delicious, and they have fun experimenting with different combinations of foods.

The Western Fair District has announced a new \$30,000 program with Growing Chefs! to promote a program to getting kids hooked on healthy eating. As partners in food and agricultural based education, both Western Fair District and Growing Chefs! Ontario are looking forward to demonstrating new ways in which community organizations and local businesses can work together to create lasting change in our communities. Growing Chefs! has so many programs surrounding food, how to use food and the benefits to all involved, but these are just a few available.

The Art of Plating includes exploring the colour wheel, symmetry, negative space and dimension. The School Food Education Program is FREE thanks to individuals and company sponsors.

Children participate in a 'Fresh Food Frenzy' at the Covent Garden Market, where they go on a scavenger hunt asking questions of the farmer supplying the food, identify different fruits and vegetables, and then cook the produce they have chosen.

Family Activity Night happens on Thursdays with picnic blankets in a healthy eating environment.

The Beet Cafe is a school hot lunch program for 27,000 meals where everything is made from scratch and sold to the students for \$5.25, which is what it cost to produce. Seven schools are involved at present, in the TVDS and the Catholic School board. The funds raised in this program support a variety of other programs.

The Growing Chef Headquarters are at 460 King Street where most of the fruit and

produce used in the programs grows just outside the door in 3 main growing beds. They have a leafy stem and vegetables bed-a sensory garden and a fruit and vegetable bed. To supplement that, there are 40 different growing pots and cherry and apple trees. Through the generosity of 3M they have a whole citrus garden. Andrew was quick to point out how important company and individual donations are to all the programs benefiting children across the city.

At the centre, there are adult cooking classes, children cooking classes, Professional Development Days for Teachers and Day care providers, weddings, Bread camp, Sustainable Sea Food and a number of public and private functions.

HQ has field trips where children learn to work cooperatively in small groups to gain a clearer understanding of sustainability and learn about the food system, of which there are the global food system and the local food system.

There are 60 children divided into four groups of 15 that meet in the parking lot at 9:15 each day. The four groups are outdoors, cooking, safety and preparation and each group rotates throughout the day and then come together to enjoy a lovely meal prepared by the whole group.

Groups plant up the beds in spring, and there are also 6 weeks of summer camps.

The focus is to stress the value of food, cost, preference, time effort and the cultural connection to individuals.

Children learn about dining etiquette in English, Japanese and Ethiopian cultures, as well as many others.

Daily 75 volunteers run all the individual programs, some of them having been students in the previous programs, and moved into Chef positions at the HQ. You can volunteer online to help out with this very worthwhile program.

Programs of Edible Art are available, where the students learn all about art techniques with food, using pastry knives, sifters and squirt bottles to decorate a plate of food for visual, sensory and palate delight.

The best part of the programs comes when an individual changes their minds about hating a food (never previously tried) to with delight and surprise saying-"that's not half bad-I think I will try that again", and then talk their whole family into trying something. The children will teach the world, if you can inspire them to learn more about cooking. Thirty different community agencies all work together with HQ to benefit over 5000 children each year.

Andrew and his staff are working on a compost program to hopefully get the city involved in to benefit everyone. They also have an Autism and Alzheimer program and one for working with Immigrant Families.

Growing Chefs unites chefs, growers, educators and community members in children's food education projects.

When I read the list of programs the HQ's has available Andrew, I would say you are doing a splendid job and continue to cultivate the love for farmers and food in the children.